

## **Masters World Championships, Vuokatti, Finland, 2015**

All the talk leading up to MWC 2016 was about the very cold temperatures we were going to face. After all, the average temperature in Vuokatti in February is  $-11.2^{\circ}\text{C}$  so when, three weeks before the event, things were down at around  $-26^{\circ}\text{C}$ , all these fears seemed likely to be coming true. It was, therefore, somewhat surprising when a message came from the WMA president to say that Vuokatti had managed to prepare just 7.5 km of track and, unless it snowed a lot, we'd be limited to just that. A week or so later, however, came further messages saying that, first, it had snowed and the organisers had managed to press this down to form a base and then, second, it had gone on snowing and they'd managed to cut the full track. None the less, it was still going to be cold, so I packed all stick waxes and just one tube of klister which I was never going to use. Still, these thoughts were far from my mind when, on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February, I met up with Wendy, Brian, Gail and Jenny in Helsinki airport.

The flight from Helsinki up to Kajaani was uneventful, apart from the fact that, when we arrived at Kajaani airport, the skis of the French skiers we'd travelled with hadn't arrived, and it turned out that the skis of John and Godfrey, who'd been on earlier flights, had been left in Helsinki, too. Not a very good start, probably caused because the hold of the plane was just too small. Luckily, all ski bags arrived the following day. For us, we arrived at our apartment around midnight and, after unpacking (which revealed a bit of a lack of storage space), we were tucked up in bed by about 01:00 and (can't speak for the others, of course) I sweated throughout the night in the heat.

Thursday morning came, and the job was to find the ski store and the waxing room, in principle just downstairs from our apartment but, at first, it appeared that neither of these two rooms were where the people from the Sports Institute had left them! The problem, in the end, was more a question of using the right key, and the ski store was found to contain a series of lockable cages with plenty of space to store skis and ski bags, while the waxing room was even more betterer; two permanent wax tables with fume extraction system and easy access to power points between the two profiles, and with enough space in the room for other people to set up their own waxing tables. For the whole trip, the waxing arrangements worked fine, with very few times when neither of the benches were available.



**Our apartments, taken from the lake**



**Our lake, taken from the apartments**

With skis prepared, it was off to discover the tracks. The big advantage of our accommodation was that it was no more than 50 metres walk from the start area, something which I think everyone appreciated. Temperature was around  $-5^{\circ}\text{C}$ , which meant Swix blue VR 40 with one layer of VR 45, to provide that little bit of extra grip, under a final layer of VR 40; grip was fair but probably not quite good enough for race conditions. The tracks proved to be excellent. Out of the start there was 500 metres or so fairly flat and double-poleable, before they turned right and started the first significant climb, not so steep but lasting maybe 250 metres. After that, the next 7.5 km were a series of rolling ups and downs, with all downhills easily runnable in the tracks and three areas where the tracks had been removed but which could be skied easily. The only small criticism was related to track marking; the maps showed, for the 10 km loop, a slightly different classic and skate track. The different tracks couldn't be found, though, and we wasted a bit of time discussing possible different routes.

For those of you who know Vuokatti, this first loop of the track was never that far from the tunnel; we skied up to and past the far end of the tunnel, and then looped down beside it before climbing over the top of it after which, following, one further gentle climb, we descended on an almost straight run onto the lake. We skied around the edge of the lake, and then a short climb took us up to the bridge, which ended up being the most popular spectating point. The bridge, though, was perhaps the only poorly designed part of the track. As both the out and back part of the second loop, and the only pedestrian access, it was really too narrow. In addition, the older people's tracks didn't cross the bridge but, instead, continued past it and dropped into the stadium, but the way it was laid out meant that a lot of spectators were standing on these track. I don't think that anyone had real problems at this point, but it could have been better.

The second loop of the track had a long, steady, climb up to the high point at about 12 km, but none of this climbing was steep and none required herring boning. From the high point there followed a long, high-speed straight downhill for half a kilometre or so, luckily with a little uphill before the sharp left-hand turn. After this came a series of mainly downhill corners and the only steep downhill of the course, which could be run in the tracks for those brave enough, or with a steadying half-snow-plough for the rest of us. I wish, the first time down this hill, that I had run it in the tracks, but I got stuck on the wrong side and half in the track and I wasn't brave enough, for the rest of the event, to stay in the tracks. This downhill led into a short, flat section of maybe 500 metres, and then there was the final, steepish climb back up to and over the bridge, one last downhill left turn, then 200 metres of double poling, a final right hand turn and it was back into the stadium. Not an easy or a particularly quick course, because it required constant work, but an excellent one, nonetheless.

I was horribly stiff throughout this ski, though, and this maybe merits some explanation because of what was to come later in the week. On Monday I'd fallen ill, believing this to be food poisoning. But I had a session booked with my Personal Trainer and decided to go to it. We didn't, in my view, train all that hard, but maybe the combination with the illness had the dramatic effects and, on Tuesday morning, I was rigid in the leg department which lasted throughout the week until Friday at least. I felt better by Wednesday, though, and speaking to Hans (who'd been preparing by doing to Marcialonga races) it turned out that he'd had exactly the same problem and his illness, too, had lasted just a few days. So that ruled food poisoning out, at least.

That afternoon we visited the ski shop at the beginning of the tunnel, and then heading off to the supermarket to stock up for the stay. There's a new, large, supermarket about one kilometre or so from the Sports Institute, which hasn't been there for very long, but this made shopping very easy. We only skied once that first day – a worrying sign of maturity compared with earlier years when we'd have done at least two laps of the 15 km track!

Day 2, Thursday, and we decided to explore the 10 km track. This followed the same first few kilometres but then missed out the loop up and past the end of the tunnel. After the bridge and the first few kilometres of the second loop, the track turned right and missed out the longer climb of the 15 km loop but, instead, climbed via a 500 metre long, quite steep section up to the bottom of the long, straight run down of the longer circuit and then descended on the same route as before. There were one or two short sections of this second loop where the snow wasn't exactly pristine white, and one section of the climb on the 10 km cut-off which was distinctly yellow and icy. This second loop hadn't existed two weeks earlier, but the main thing was that there were no stones in the surface.

Then came Saturday, and the start of the racing, 30 km classic for the youngsters, 15 km classic for the oldies. No early morning start, Brian and I were first off at 09:50 so there was plenty of time to prepare and warm up. The temperature at the start was a comfortable -8 °C and it was scheduled to rise a bit to -6 °C, so neither grip nor glide were going to be an issue. For grip, Swix blue VR 40, 5 layers, worked fine for me and Brian and I headed over to the warm-up track. This was another feature of this venue that was excellent; previous venues have had crappy little 50 metre affairs, or entirely flat tracks, often with conditions completely unrepresentative of the race tracks. Vuokatti's version was fantastic; 500 metres or so long, two hills representative of the race track, very well prepared and, surprisingly, very few other people on it. I was happy with my waxing so could spend a good half an hour on warming up (although Brian was faffing with his grip wax), before it was time to head over to the start (all of which could be done on skis).

We had our own changing booth in the building right by the start, where clothing could be safely left, and there were plenty of toilets in and around the start area, so there was no discomfort or silly queuing just prior to the race, and very easy to walk out to the start without getting cold. Finally we were off and, as might be expected, the bunch of M06s was soon disappearing into the distance. Our race start appeared later on the internet, and it was interesting to note how slowly Brian and I moved away (relatively). Okay, we lost just 2 or 3 seconds, but that's the difference between being with the pack and being some metres behind it. If you want to see pictures and short videos of the event, in fact, the Australian group has a good Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/558697700978030/?ref=bookmarks>.

I was, as a result, a little off the bunch as we headed up the small hill out of the stadium, Brian a few metres ahead of me. But there were people around and behind me, and I even got past a few people as we turned and headed up the steeper hill. Brian was not feeling at his best, though (illness brewing) and I caught him and went past. But there was no shaking him off; I was quicker on the downhill but he could catch me on the uphill although, for obvious reasons, he didn't want to go past and so we stayed line astern for most of the rest of the race. Just coming up to the high point on the second lap, I was thinking to myself "If he wants to go, now's the time to do so", and Brian had the same thoughts and was gone! Maybe if I'd done a few more races, I could have worked a bit harder to try to stick with him, but this was my first serious race of any sort for 2 years so I was concerned about not pushing things too hard, and let him go. Never mind, I'd led for 7/8<sup>ths</sup> of the race and there were plenty of people behind us, but my percentage of the winner's time was a little disappointing.



**A.A. Pervert and B.A. Dams, line astern, as they were for most of the 30 km**



**John Peatfield, happy with his debut, and Chris Richards, prepare to start**

We had three racers in the M07-M09 category: Chris Richards, an experienced Masters skier, Hans Nilsson in his second Masters after Pillerseetal, and John Peatfield, making his Masters debut as one of the oldest Brits ever to do so. Patrick o'Connor decided not to race, having been ill in the lead up to the event, and Wendy didn't race, either, she having been ill just after Christmas which had hampered her training.

Hans was first off and, although he was using the same basic grip wax as me, he had fewer layers and, consequently, had less good grip. Despite this, his 35.2 % of the winner's time was not only his best of this event, it was also his best Masters performance ever. Chris and John were next off, but there was confusion in the holding pen which led to not all of the M08s being allowed onto the start line. By the time the organisers realised the mistake, Chris had missed his start by up to 5 minutes. The organisers apologised for the confusion at that evening's Team Captains' meeting, and it didn't happen again but, in reality, it should never have happened at all. Within the overall scheme of things, it was one small mistake, but for those skiers affected, it was a big part of their experience! Speaking to John after his race, he seemed happy with his debut and, in fact, although his percentages were fairly consistent over the whole week, this was actually his best result of the event.



Start of the M07 race. That building at back left is the end of the blocks we were staying in



Hans making his way strongly up the hill towards the bridge

#### Men's M01-M06 30 km classic technique, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Christian Grannas	FIN	M02	1.22:54.2	21.7 km/h	
1)	Andrey Sergeev	RUS	M06	1.30:33.3	19.9 km/h	
36)	Brian Adams	GBR	M06	2.01:59.3	14.8 km/h	34.7 %
37)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	2.03:03.7	14.6 km/h	35.9 % (46 starters)

#### Men's M07-M09 15 km classic technique, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Guido Masiero	ITA	M07	44:38.9	20.2 km/h	
52)	Hans Nilsson	GBR	M07	1.06:21.8	13.6 km/h	48.6 % (57 starters)
1)	Alexei Khvostov	RUS	M08	46:51.9	19.2 km/h	
54)	Chris Richards	GBR	M08	1.07:53.5	13.3 km/h	44.9 %
64)	John Peatfield	GBR	M08	1.28:45.1	10.1 km/h	89.4 % (68 starters)
1)	Alpo Virtanen	FIN	M09	49:27.7	18.2 km/h	
	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M09	DNS		(37 starters)

#### Ladies F07-F09 15 km classic technique, Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Pat Pierce	CAN	F07	53:26.1	16.8 km/h	
	Wendy McRae	GBR	F07	DNS		(16 starters)

After the race, Wendy and I headed for the VIP suite, a building right behind the start reserved for National Directors, their guests and other less important dignitaries. This was excellent; we could enjoy as much coffee as we fancied (which is, actually, only ever two cups, because Finnish coffee can be pretty strong), open sandwiches and typical Finnish cakes. What a shame that it only existed for this one first day! While in there, we were discussing the weather problems with the event director. It seems that the real problem had not been warm conditions (although a warm spell had melted the early season snow) but, rather, the dry conditions which meant that nothing was coming out of the sky (*Well done for explaining 'dry'! Ed.*).

The temperature was on its way up for the next event, the middle distance freestyle race on Sunday; -3 °C in the morning and maybe even warmer by the time the races ended. We had quite a few members starting on this day: Chris Donnelly, Alasdair Wilson, Godfrey Rhimes, Steve Smigiel and Jenny Murray all making returns to the Masters, and Gail Donald making her debut. Steve, I fancy, was somewhat below his normal form; he produced his best percentage in this race and then seemed to get progressively more tired as the event went on. This was Alasdair's best performance of the week, too, but somewhat down on his best, possibly the nature of the track making it difficult for any of us to get very good percentages. Godfrey, also, recorded his best result but, strangely, not his fastest speed.

That evening there were 'rumblings', even accusations, of cheating, against Chris Donnelly. It would appear that, inadvertently, he had taken the wrong route down near the biathlon range and this shortened his race by, I guess, about 700 metres. A shame, really, because these things shouldn't happen with proper track marking, but this particular spot was to cause a lot more problems in the very last race, and a lot of people being disqualified. No one saw Chris's mistake, though (apart from Zac Zacharias from Australia, against whom he was racing and who, in this race, he beat), so his result stands.

This was the first time that Jenny had completed a 15 km freestyle race at the Masters; in her first event she'd raced classic over this same distance, while in Pillerseetal the race had been shortened to 10 km. Like many other Brits, this was marginally her best race of the event, but a little down on her best results over a similar distance. Star of this day, though, was without question Gail. A time of just over 55 minutes for 15 km made her faster than a lot of men, and her percentage of 28.3 % was her best of the event, best British lady's result and only beaten by two other British men's percentages throughout the whole week – not bad for a first-ever Masters race!

#### Men's M01-M06 30 km free technique, Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Johan Gustafsson	FIN	M01	1.18:40.7	22.9 km/h	
1)	Ilmo Pulkkinen	FIN	M06	1.24:34.6	21.2 km/h	
35)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M06	1.52:59.3	15.9 km/h	33.6 % (38 starters)

#### Men's M07-M09 15 km free technique, Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Kamil Bikkulov	RUS	M07	41:39.5	21.6 km/h	
38)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M07	59:02.4	15.2 km/h	41.8 %
41)	Godfrey Rhimes	GBR	M07	1.02:34.2	14.4 km/h	50.2 % (43 starters)
1)	Giuliano Secco	ITA	M09	45:18.5	19.9 km/h	
14)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	58:01.5	15.5 km/h	28.1 % (25 starters)

#### Ladies F01-F06 15 km free technique, Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Sini Alusniemi	FIN	F01	39:22.1	22.9 km/h	
4)	Jennifer Munro	GBR	F01	1.00:33.1	14.9 km/h	53.8 % (4 starters)
1)	Maija Oravamaki	FIN	F03	43:00.5	20.9 km/h	
11)	Gail Donald	GBR	F03	55:10.0	16.3 km/h	28.3 % (11 starters)

The weather forecast for Monday had not been looking promising for a few days, at least not from a classic point of view, 0 °C and the possibility of snow! Disaster, or at least potential disaster as I recalled Pillerseetal, McCall, Seefeld, ..., all those other bad races where I'd got the grip waxing wrong! So concerned was I that I even contemplated buying zero ski, but the shop had only skin skis (see later). In the end, I opted for €20 and the professional wax service, with the promise of two layers of klister and two layers of super-duper hard wax on top; they lied, though!

When I visited the shop to discuss the deal, they requested my skis immediately, and this proved my undoing. The skis had been glide waxed but not rilled, and no fluoro powder had been added and, since I was more worried about getting the grip right than the glide, I did neither but, instead, took the skis straight to the shop. The following morning, when I collected them, they had a very smooth, thick layer of klister, but no sign of any hard wax because it had never been cold enough to apply. Oh well, with that job I took the skis and headed over to the warm-up track which now, because of the warm weather and melting snow, required taking

the skis off to get through the tunnel. I can report that the grip was excellent, both during the warm-up and during the race, with just a little icing if I stepped out of the track. Fair enough, time for the start.



Jenny and Gail, happy either that it's all about to begin or that it's just all over



Chris D. contemplating which way to go ...

I've long had a rivalry with my Czech National Director friend Libor, and I don't often come out ahead. As we set off, I could see him not very far in front of me but clearly on faster skis. As soon as we came to the first steep hill, though, I caught him but not quite enough to get past. At the top of the hill and down the other side, he pulled away from me with ease, and this continued throughout the whole race; every uphill I caught up, every downhill he pulled away. Perhaps the best indication of slow skis was on the long run down towards the lake. In the 30 km race I'd been in a tuck almost the whole way down; this time I was having to double pole. Oh well. In the end, there had been no need for panic, and those who did (me and Patrick) suffered. This was a normal klister day, and anything in the silver-red range would have done the job, as Wendy (making her debut) and Hans proved. Patrick had opted for his fish scale skis, and this was a slow option in the conditions.

#### Men's M01-M06 10 km classic technique, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Tommy Gustavsson	SWE	M05	27:33.0	21.8 km/h	
1)	Yury Stepanov	RUS	M06	29:28.8	20.4 km/h	
38)	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	39:44.8	15.1 km/h	34.8 % (41 starters)

#### Men's M07-M09 10 km classic technique, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Heikki Ruokonen	FIN	M07	30:28.8	19.7 km/h	
40)	Hans Nilsson	GBR	M07	41:00.3	15.6 km/h	34.5 % (48 starters)
1)	Ola Kvaale	NOR	M09	33:32.9	17.9 km/h	
28)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M09	1.01:14.8	9.8 km/h	82.6 % (30 starters)

#### Ladies F07-F09 10 km classic technique, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Merja Teravainen	FIN	F07	37:50.0	15.9 km/h	
11)	Wendy McRae	GBR	F07	1.02:39.9	9.6 km/h	65.6 % (11 starters)

Not much to say about the 10 km free technique race, which seemed to pass off without incident. Brian recorded his best, and BMCCSA's best, percentage of this event, at 24.8 %, but this made it only onto the second page of the British Best-of-All Time Masters list. John was happy to have completed his race because he rarely skates at all and had requested a change (not permitted) to the classic version, Steve produced his best performance of this Masters, while Gail once again excelled, producing a percentage of the winner's time only bettered by Brian – what a shame that such a performance still resulted in a British Gold Medal ☹.

### Men's M01-M06 10 km free technique, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Johan Gustafsson	FIN	M01	24:16.3	24.7 km/h	
1)	Ilmo Pulkkinen	FIN	M06	25:43.1	23.3 km/h	
32)	Brian Adams	GBR	M06	32:05.9	18.7 km/h	24.8 %
42)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M06	35:10.9	17.1 km/h	36.8 % (47 starters)

### Men's M07-M09 10 km free technique, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Guido Masiero	ITA	M07	27:30.4	21.8 km/h	
48)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M07	40:58.6	14.6 km/h	49.0 %
50)	Godfrey Rhimes	GBR	M07	42:59.2	14.0 km/h	56.3 % (54 starters)
1)	Sakari Matikainen	FIN	M08	28:56.1	20.7 km/h	
44)	Chris Richards	GBR	M08	39:01.1	15.4 km/h	34.9 %
53)	John Peatfield	GBR	M08	55:08.2	10.9 km/h	90.6 % (54 starters)
1)	Paul Graber	SUI	M09	29:41.9	20.2 km/h	
20)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	38:59.0	15.4 km/h	31.3 % (32 starters)

### Ladies F01-F06 10 km free technique, Monday 8<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Sini Alusniemi	FIN	F01	27:04.0	22.4 km/h	
4)	Jenny Munro	GBR	F01	41:45.0	14.1 km/h	54.2 % (4 starters)
1)	Natalia Ziatikova	RUS	F03	28:53.4	20.8 km/h	
12)	Gail Donald	GBR	F03	38:15.7	15.7 km/h	32.4 % (12 starters)

Tuesday was the rest day, during which there was much activity out on the lake, which had decided to take the Spring-like weather conditions as an opportunity to melt. Some people were discontented with the lack of cultural activities laid on for this day, but it was explained to them that Vuokatti is, after all, pretty much in the middle of nowhere, and 'culture' begins and ends with winter sports, reindeer and tar! Brian, Gail and I took the opportunity to try out 'skin skis' which were on offer, and to explore the relay tracks (which this time were divided into classic and skate, but were not very well signposted). As we came down onto the lake, this was like the big dipper at a funfair, the tracks being full of water, which explained all the activity of using piste bashers to push snow up to make a 'causeway' for us to ski over. At that evening's Team Captains meeting, it was unclear whether the causeway would be used because, as the machines were making it, the ice was going "Eeeerrr, eeerrr" and they feared losing the machines into the depths! After trying the skin skis, I went out for a second time around what turned out to be the correct classic track (glad that I'd found that) on my 'hairies', and this time I went across the causeway, which was pretty ropey! You can read about the skin skis and hairies a bit later on in this Newsletter.

Wednesday, an exciting day – relays! We had enough volunteers for two Men's teams, and we debated whether the teams should be made up for an intra-British clash or whether we should create one team capable of beating our rivals Australia in the M06 category. We opted for the latter. This time my skis were properly waxed (by myself) and I was happy with them throughout, grip and glide, in much the same conditions as for the 10 km race and was well warmed up on the excellent (but very under-used) warm up tracks (where, I wonder, did the other 300 or so skiers warm up?). For some reason, the organisers had decided to put three categories together, M05, M06 and M07, and this meant that the field was quite large. Just prior to the start, I heard two Americans, warming up, say "It's definitely hairies" and I thought to myself "It most definitely isn't", and I continued to think that as I skied past one of them up the first hill.

Interestingly, despite the good grip conditions, the good guys seemed to go into herringbone very early on each hill and this, having destroyed the classic tracks, meant that there was no choice but to follow suit. I was standing next to my Australian rival at the start and wished him luck, and then was disappointed as he skied off ahead of me! After that we had a good and close battle – I overtook him shortly after the short, steep climb at half distance which was used only for this race, and thought that I'd pulled ahead. The causeway was not a great deal less ropey than it had been the previous day, and double poling was the only real option, despite the snow being slow. Towards the end of the causeway, I felt a twinge in my lower back – more about this is a second.

Coming up to the bridge near the end, I thought that I heard people shouting for a Frenchman so, when someone came past, I didn't realise that it was Aussie Adrian; not that I could have done much about it because I was on my limit and, sadly, he came to the exchange about 5 second ahead. In my defence, Adrian did go on to clock a 2 hour 30 minute 45 km skate time two days later, so he must be pretty strong! Second leg was over to Hans and he had a storming run, overtaking the Aussie Number Two Andrew Walker and handing over a 15 second lead to Chris Donnelly. Now the wisdom of the Australian's strategy came out; in Pillerseetal they'd used Zac Zacharias as a classic skier – not his strongest technique. This time they had two good classic skiers so Zac was deployed as a skater and, despite Chris' best efforts, we were 22 seconds down after the third leg. Only Brian left – could he save the day?

Nope! He was 13 seconds faster than his rival Friedl but, despite this and despite our desperate cheers as he came over the bridge, we lost by a tantalising 9 seconds. Sniff. The trouble with such a close race is that there are always questions afterwards; "Could I have gone 10 seconds quicker?" Almost certainly, on a different day! "Would it have made any difference?". Who knows? Anyway, in the results below, I've shown both our and the Australian results, so you can see how this close drama unfolded. BMCCSA skiers actually came away with three British medals, Steve and his American team not able to repeat his real bronze medal from Russia last year.

#### Men's M01-M09 4 x 5 km relay, Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	M01	RUS	48:51.2					
1)	M06	ITA	51:53.3					
10)	M06	AUS	1.08:28.2	Adrian Blake	18:02.0	18:02.0		
				Andrew Walker	18:31.4	36:33.4		
				Zac Zaharias	16:17.5	52:51.0		
				Friedl Bartsch	15:37.2	1.08:28.2		
11)	M06	GBR	1.08:37.3	Adam Pinney	18:07.6	18:07.6		
				Hans Nilsson	18:10.8	36:18.4		
				Chris Donnelly	16:54.7	53:13.1		
				Brian Adams	15:24.2	1.08:37.3	34.6 % (11 starters)	
1)	M07	RUS	54:25.5					
10)	M07	GBR	1.22:44.0	Alasdair Wilson	19:54.7	19:54.7		
				John Peatfield	24:14.2	44:09.0		
				Godfrey Rhimes	20:27.2	1.04:36.3		
				Chris Richards	18:07.7	1.22:44.0	52.0 % (10 starters)	
1)	M08	FIN	57:07.6					
9)	M08	USA	1.10:47.5	Bill Brundage	16:35.6	16:35.6		
				Bob Gray	17:30.1	35:05.7		
				Fred Longhart	18:07.2	52:12.9		
				Steve Smigiel	18:34.5	1.10:47.5	23.9 % (9 starters)	

Remember my lower back twinge? There are two types of muscle problem I have with my back: those minor ones, usually in the upper or middle back, which can be stretched away or skied through, and those serious ones in the lower back which give me half an hour to get home and then stiffen horribly. This twinge was one of the second ones (luckily it happened only a few minutes from the end of the relay) but, soon afterwards, it did indeed stiffen and, despite the best massaging efforts of Jenny that evening, I was not going to be starting the 45 km race the following day. Not only that, but the illness which had affected Brian early in the trip now reappeared, in more serious form, for Jenny and Gail – not good preparation, then, for any of us for the longer races.

That left only four BMCCSA members in the longer classic event: Hans, John, Patrick and Wendy. Hans was content with his race, his second best of the event and, perhaps surprisingly, substantially better than his performance in the 15 km middle distance event despite him claiming a preference for shorter races. For John this was marginally his least good performance but, while he will miss Klosters next season, he's planning to continue his Masters career in Minneapolis in 2018.

Marie Claude (Chris. D's wife) and I were standing watching John come back over the bridge and he was looking tired at the end of his second lap. There were marginal traces of skating going on, so we both shouted "Don't skate", before realising that we were standing right beside two Jury members – oops! We hastily tried to cover up the offence and, luckily, it went unnoticed! Patrick, back on waxable skis, put up a slightly better performance in his race, too, compared with the earlier 10 km race. This just left Wendy to finish. Despite originally planning not to race at all at this event, she'd got the urge to race again from the 10 km and went even better over this longer distance, not only improving her percentage and her race speed but, this time, also beating someone in her class. She was glad, when it was all over, that she had raced, and she's now gone into Top Training prior to Klosters.



Alasdair, about to return over the bridge, at the end of his 30 km free race



Hans at the end of the causeway. Note the water on either side, indicating how warm it had been all week

#### Men's M01-M06 45 km classic technique, Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Jani-Pekka Pantti	FIN	M01	2.15:10.4	20.0 km/h	
1)	Andrey Sergeev	RUS	M06	2.25:09.2	18.6 km/h	
	Adam Pinney	GBR	M06	DNS		(30 starters)

#### Men's M07-M09 30 km classic technique, Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Heikki Ruokonen	FIN	M07	1.37:21.5	18.5 km/h	
39)	Hans Nilsson	GBR	M07	2.11:37.3	13.7 km/h	35.2 % (46 starters)
1)	Oddvar Vehusheia	NOR	M08	1.38:23.6	18.3 km/h	
45)	John Peatfield	GBR	M08	3.09:35.6	9.5 km/h	92.7 % (51 starters)
1)	Ola Kvaale	NOR	M09	1.46:28.4	16.9 km/h	
27)	Patrick o'Connor	USA	M09	3.12:48.1	9.3 km/h	81.1 % (31 starters)

#### Ladies F07-F09 30 km classic technique, Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Pat Pierce	CAN	F07	1.54:12.2	15.8 km/h	
12)	Wendy McRae	GBR	F07	2.55:14.7	10.3 km/h	53.5 % (13 starters)

Friday came, at last, and time for the longest, final, skate race. The night before, we'd been told that people would be restricted to double poling across the causeway (perhaps they feared someone skating off it and drowning!), but this limitation was withdrawn just before the start. It was a little colder for this race, at around -2 °C, and a strong wind made it cold for spectating. First off were Brian and Chris D. and, as they came up to the bridge on the first lap, Brian seemed to be going well, ahead of my mate Libor and Aussie Zac, while Chris was a little way behind them but, nonetheless, on his way to a faster race (in perhaps better conditions) than in his 30 km race. On the second lap, though, we waited and there Brian wasn't. With nothing in the tank, he'd stopped after the first lap. Much the same fate applied to Jenny in her race, although it was probably more the illness which did for her.

There were no problems for Chris with the track this time, but quite a large number of people, including French national director Gilles, made the same mistake as Chris had made in his first race and were disqualified. Top Finnish skier Sirrka Ehrnrooth (F06) had made the same mistake the day before and, with great honesty (despite winning the race) went to the Jury afterwards and *asked* to be disqualified! Maybe with so many medals in her bag, missing one was not such a big loss. Ironically, I'd specifically asked, at the Team Captain's meeting, that this particular junction be better marked, and the organisers agreed. I know the arguments that it's the skier's own responsibility for skiing the correct tracks, blah, blah, blah, but I don't think that this sort of mistake should ever be allowed to happen, because it spoils everyone's enjoyment of the event.

Alasdair seemed to be skiing strongly throughout his race, but his percentage was middling by his best standards. Godfrey, though, was rightly proud of finally breaking the 15 km/h mark, a good achievement indeed. Chris Richards put up his best performance of the whole week and we remarked that his technique looked solid throughout, and substantially better than those around him while, sadly, this was Steve's least good performance – rock and roll perhaps best describes his technique as he looked tired coming past us. Only Gail left to mention – another fine performance despite being very ill the day before, but, sadly, another British gold medal; where's the justice in that?

Wendy and I had a good laugh as we stood at the bridge. An American lady came past who was obviously a little behind her rivals with two older age group skiers in between. John (J.D.) Downing, the US National Director and WMA president, shouted out "Use them as a bridge". Well, this couldn't go un-teased, so the next skiers that came past led to us shouting "Use the bridge as a bridge" – all good, clean fun! Towards the end of this race, we had a nice comment, as one of the Brits (maybe it was John) was finishing, from long-time Masters commentator and interpreter Claudine, who referred to us as "A small team, but very keen"! Sadly, she then rather let herself down by referring to Gail as "Donald Gail", hence the caption on the front page of the Newsletter.

#### Men's M01-M06 45 km free technique, Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Igor Kuznetsov	RUS	M04	1.50:52.6	24.3 km/h	
1)	Sergey Ivanov	RUS	M06	1.58:36.1	22.8 km/h	
41)	Chris Donnelly	GBR	M06	2.45:08.1	16.4 km/h	39.2 %
	Brian Adams	GBR	M06	DNF		(47 starters)

#### Men's M07-M09 30 km free technique, Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Guido Masiero	ITA	M07	1.16:33.8	23.5 km/h	
34)	Alasdair Wilson	GBR	M07	1.51:18.8	16.2 km/h	45.4 %
38)	Godfrey Rhimes	GBR	M07	1.58:25.6	15.2 km/h	54.7 % (49 starters)
1)	Sakari Matikainen	FIN	M08	1.25:16.1	21.1 km/h	
40)	Chris Richards	GBR	M08	1.51:57.2	16.1 km/h	31.3 % (50 starters)
1)	Giuliano Secco	ITA	M09	1.29:14.4	20.2 km/h	
14)	Steve Smigiel	USA	M09	1.58:09.2	15.2 km/h	32.4 % (23 starters)

#### Ladies F01-F06 30 km free technique, Friday 12<sup>th</sup> February

Fastest	Sini Alusniemi	FIN	F01	1.16:29.5	23.5 km/h	
	Jenny Munro	GBR	F01	DNF		(4 starters)
1)	Natalia Ziatikova	RUS	F03	1.22:47.3	21.7 km/h	
10)	Gail Donald	GBR	F03	1.55:03.1	15.6 km/h	39.0 % (10 starters)

The banquet that evening was a good one! With so many people, the food service was perhaps a little slow, but the self-service arrangements for the main course and pudding worked well, and there was plenty enough food. Speeches and other nonsense were kept to a minimum (and what there was couldn't be heard anyway) and then, towards the end, the British Team stood up *en masse* to triumph in the (informal) end-of-event dance competition! A satisfactory end to a satisfactory event.



**My mate Libor mocks me after his lucky victory in the 10 km. In between us is Dutch National Director Gezina Perkaan**



**Godfrey, having just cracked the 15 km/h barrier faster, apparently, than he can run!**



**A bevy of VIPs: J.D. Downing, USA and WMA president, Leena Jaskalainen, Finland, retiring after 25 years, yours Truly Scrumptious and Warren Feakes, Australia**

Looking back, I would say that this was mainly a fine event. The tracks were excellent and the warm-up track was perfect (even allowing for the tricky weather conditions), the organisation was generally friendly and competent despite the few mistakes, and they changed things quickly and efficiently when they could; the drinks station, for example, was moved from the entry to the bridge, where it didn't really work, and the layout of the bridge area was improved after a couple of days. Our accommodation was good, well priced and very well placed (there was, actually, plenty of storage space as long as it was accepted that everything had to go into the storage places provided – for some of us a large drawer under the bed). For those who chose to eat in the Sports Institute, the food was good, there was plenty of it, and it was reasonably priced, while for those who opted for self-catering, the new shop made getting provisions easy.

Some people complained about the lack of a communal area to meet other people, although this was compensated for by so many people being very close to the stadium, while some people also complained about the lack of cultural activities but this didn't seem to me to be such a big deal. I did slightly miss the 'communal' feeling of the whole team being together (even if most of us were in adjacent apartments), but we did get together from time to time. The waxing facilities were great, too (although had we paid the €500 they wanted for us to hire a wax cabin, at 800 metres from the start, we would have been very disappointed, as the French were), the stadium arrangements were good, and the banquet was fun! All in all, a very worthwhile event.